

## Rabies, Animal

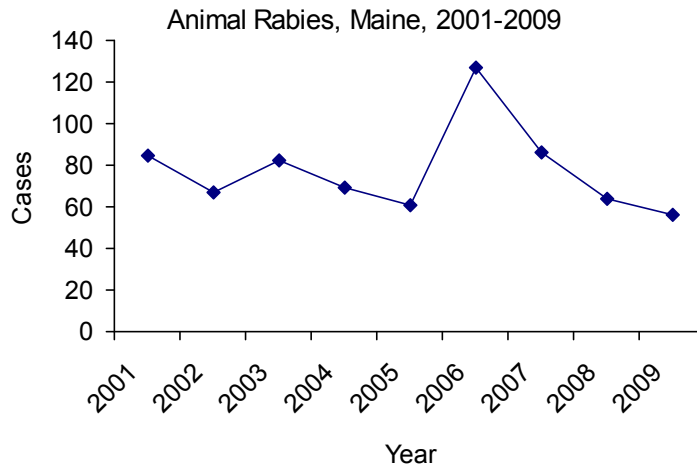
<b>2009 Case Total</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Maine Rate</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>U.S. Count (2009)</b>	<b>6,690</b>

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system (brain and spinal cord) of humans. Rabies in humans is rare in the United States. The vast majority of rabies infections are found in wild animals, including raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Humans usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, for people to get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. Because rabies has also occurred in people who have very close contact with bats without an apparent bite, this type of contact is also considered a risk and should be followed up by a health care provider.

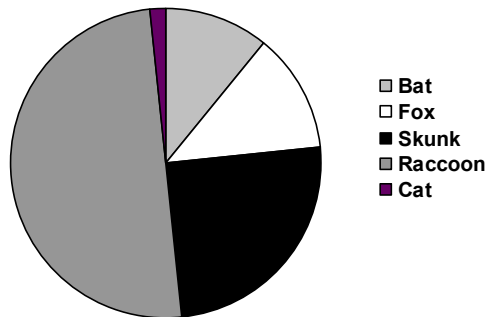
The virus infects the central nervous system. The earliest symptoms include fever and general discomfort. As the disease progresses symptoms may include difficulty sleeping, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing, and fear of water. Death generally follows a few days after the onset of symptoms.

- Case total of 56 represents a decrease from 2008
- The 2004-2008 median number of cases per year was 68 cases
- The last reported case of human rabies was in 1937

Since rabies infects the central nervous system and is not found in the blood of infected animals, testing for rabies requires central nervous system or brain tissue, which must be obtained from the animal after it is deceased. Using direct fluorescent antibody testing the state's public health laboratory can determine whether or not wild or domestic animals have been infected with the virus.



Positive Rabies Results by Species, Maine, 2009



If it is determined that a human has been exposed to an infected animal, a course of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is recommended. PEP consists of a course of immune globulin and vaccine over a 14 day period. In 2009, guidelines were revised to change PEP to a four dose course over 14 days.

Human deaths due to rabies in the United States have almost disappeared. This is a measure of the effectiveness of PEP and increased public awareness to reduce the number of exposures. Though rabies is generally found in wild animals, it is important to keep domestic animals up to date on rabies vaccination to minimize the risk of exposure to humans.

In 2009, 92% of rabies cases occurred in wildlife in the United States. This represents a 2.2% reduction in the total number of rabid animals from the previous year.